

## **Delores? You There? by icanthinkofausername, icarusty (icanthinkofausername)**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016), The Umbrella Academy (TV)

**Genre:** Crossover, Eleven is Delores, Five is a Bastard, Fun, Gen, Hehehe, but not a lot, some violence

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Delores, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Number Five | The Boy (Umbrella Academy), Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

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**Summary:**

For his forty-five years in the apocalypse, Five was haunted by a dream, a specific dream of being in a dark, wide place with no way out and water underneath his academy-issue shoes. And a girl. A girl with a shaved head and inquiring questions.

He named her Delores.

## 1. Chapter 1

Most days, Five felt like he was going crazy. It was just a common feeling for him, a feeling of spiralling out of control, of being surrounded by things he couldn't change. Maybe that was why he tried so hard to control what he could.

But he felt like he was actually insane now, attempting to time travel with passengers. He could barely time travel by himself, this was crazy. That craziness made adrenaline surge through his veins, made his breathing get faster and his knuckles grow white around his siblings' wrists. He had messed up his chance to save the world, and he might very well kill his siblings by doing this. They'd agreed that this was their only chance, but oh, Five had run the numbers. Twice. There was a very, very slim chance he'd do this right.

Light blurred the theater around him. "Hold on!" he shouted. "This might get messy!"

And then they were gone, and he was alone. For a split, hanging second, a second that didn't feel like a second, he was floating. The world was black and he was lit by an unseen white light. He didn't immediately identify that this space was wrong, that he shouldn't be there. It was like a dream. He was hanging in the air, suspended by something in his chest, pulling him upward. He moved his hands and felt them ripple through time, leaving trails of that special blue behind. His chest felt full, like he was holding his breath. The adrenaline was gone, and he was left staring into the black. His brow furrowed when he realised he'd been there before, in a half-remembered dream or perhaps... As soon as he realised something was wrong, he fell on his hands and knees, hands in something like water. "Luther!" he shouted, looking up. It echoed in the black. "Diego?"

And then someone appeared. Ahead of him, a white blotch on the black everything. He scrambled to his feet and stepped forward, bowling shoes splashing in the water.

Another step forward. "Vanya?" Five whispered, looking at the white blotch. He started and bolted towards it. *Holy shit holy shit holy shit*

*I've stranded them holy shit not again-*

The blotch turned, then Five skidded in front of her. It wasn't Vanya. The little girl's head was shaved and her nose bloody, and she was wearing a dripping pink dress. Five's mind stuttered, because it looked like-it looked like- "Delores?" he whispered.

Delores's eyes widened. "Delores?" she repeated softly, with just enough inflection to make it a question. Five blinked, looking down at her. "Blue boy?" she asked, reaching a careful hand towards his shoulder.

"Why would I be a blue boy?" Five asked, breathless. He grabbed her hand, watched her eyes widen as he grinned. She had hands! She was real, he wasn't crazy, those dreams he'd had in the apocalypse... Delores.

Delores took it away suddenly, almost shocked, and then peered at him closely. "Why would I be a Delores?"

Five frowned. "Bec—" he started, but then he felt a lurch in his gut and a pull in his hands. He fell back into the blue, pulling him back to reality. The familiar blue warped and vibrated around him as he toppled, and he felt the black void speeding away from him. He landed, suddenly, onto pavement. Hard, real, pavement, and he forgot the hanging second due to sheer panic. He levered himself up quickly, looked around. "Luther?" he asked again. Five started when he heard shots. "Diego?"

And then it all went to shit.

Five always felt a little wild after he killed someone, so the twelve someones of the board he'd slaughtered were making him a little anxious. He'd bagged A.J, and now all he had to do was... go back to 1963. But he couldn't. Because he felt weird. He'd never been one to rely on instincts, preferring cold, hard facts over vague notions caused by chemicals in the brain, but he hesitated because of them now. Ever since he arrived in 1982, he'd been feeling it. It felt like he felt those years in the apocalypse. Impossible. Strange. Grief-stricken.

Delores. He felt *her*. And he started to remember those dreams he had in those forty-five impossible years. Dreams of his family, of course, but also dreams of a friend. He'd wake up with just the barest image of a little girl in a polka-dot gown and a shaved head, staring at him with big brown eyes. Five had made so many stories about the little girl he'd named Delores. He remembered scrawling her image onto walls in the ashes of civilization. Polka-dot gown and a shaved head, along with the number five, of course. He'd left their images in every place he went, hoping if there was another human out there besides him and Delores, they'd follow. Nobody ever did.

But she had followed him. She was somewhere in 1982. Five paced the road outside of the inn he'd slaughtered the board in, A.J in a bag in his hand, and tried to puzzle out why.

Delores was... real. He'd always harbored this niggling little thought in the back of his head, the thought that maybe she was just a mannequin, and not this girl in his dreams. But the feeling of... connection he felt right now was insane, as well as that moment he'd had time travelling his siblings. Insane. He could be insane.

Five stopped his pacing. Or he could be *right*.

How to contact her. He had all the time in the world to get back to 1963. He could spend a year here and nobody would ever be the wiser.

Because this was so curious. And like Pogo had always said, Five's curiosity could have killed a hundred cats. Delores was fascinating and strange and he hadn't been able to catch a break since he'd decided to stop the apocalypse. So this could be his break. This could be how he got to have his own side mission, got to have his own version of a vacation. Five squatted down, nibbling at his thumb. How to find her?

An hour later, he stood waiting for the bus, feeling blood drip down his cheek with the night rain. He'd remembered something about Dr. Brenner in his dreams, along with something about Hawkins. The nearest Hawkins was in Michigan, and then there was one in Indiana,

and Kentucky, and two in Louisiana, so Five figured he'd try them in order. Michigan was closest, so Michigan would be first. He'd stolen some money and ran to a bus stop. The dirty machine screeched into the lot, and the single passenger going out gave the blood-covered Five an odd look before making her way into town.

Giving the passenger the best smile he could manage, Five stepped forward into the run-down bus. He slouched against the window in the back where the lighting was the dimmest and closed his eyes, trying his hardest to fall asleep.

His dreams were haunted.

## 2. Blue Boy

The blue boy had run through her dreams, when she'd been a kid. Always fast, always like he was going somewhere important. El had tried to follow him, bare feet slipping on the slick floor, but he was too fast. Sometimes he muttered things, as he dipped in and out of the black of that huge, echoing space that she went in her dreams, where she went in the static.

*"You have teeth and claws and things that tear, but I am fast. Much too fast for you."*

*"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fucking shit--!"*

*"Jesus Christ, when will father learn I'm not a--"*

*"I am a gazelle, and the jungle is my home!"*

Strange words, words she didn't understand now and probably never would. Just dreams, El told herself. Gibberish (word she'd learned day 68). El'd never really thought about him in excess, after Papa had told her about dreams, that they didn't mean anything. One time she drew him, the blue boy from her dreams, drew the patch on his chest, four squares with colors red and blue. Papa had asked her where she'd seen that before, but El just shrugged, not having the words to explain that blue boy. She'd never really had the words to explain him. El's curiosity was reawakened after the makeshift sensory deprivation tank incident, about how he'd talked to her, *touched* her, an impossibility in that black not-a-place. At night, sleeping in Hopper's wonderful cabin, her thoughts wandered to Mike and to the blue boy with increased curiosity. Now she could think about those things, now she could let her mind wander between soap operas and new words. Of course, she missed Mike, but she thought the blue boy was more... mysterious. She'd learned that word on day 167, two weeks ago.

El hadn't told Hopper about the blue boy yet. Somehow, he just felt like her secret, her blue boy, the one in her dreams, the one who was just as impossible as herself. Her secret, her little mystery.

El sat up in bed, thinking. She flung the covers off of herself and walked over to the tv, turning the channel to a channel she knew never had anything but static, and tied the bandana around her eyes. She'd thought it had been dark in the room before, but now, behind the bandana, she saw pure dark, blackest black. El thought about the darkness, thought about the static, thought about water beneath her feet and suddenly... the world tilted.

Water splashed around her bare feet as she glanced around, stumbling into that space. She felt, somewhere, blood dripping down her lip. Nobody was there with her, nobody lit by an unseen spotlight. "Blue boy?" she whispered, glancing around.

Nothing. Maybe he wasn't--

A flash of blue behind her. She spun, squinted at the dark, and swallowed when she spotted him. Blue boy's back was turned, and his hand raised a little, resting on a desk.

"Blue boy?" she said again, louder this time.

Nothing. She creped around him, watched him watching something she couldn't see. Blue Boy suddenly sighed, fingers tapping impatiently on the wood desk in front of him.

"Hello?" he sighed, voice loud and echoing in her black void. "I'm not waiting any longer, come on."

She heard murmuring from someone El couldn't see as she waved a hand in front of Blue Boy's face. He couldn't see her, at least not right now. "Ma'am?" sighed the Blue Boy, impatient and frustrated. "Thank you."

A book appeared in his hands, and he flicked it open, running a finger down to a line somewhere. "Damn," he muttered under his breath, disappointed. Blue boy closed the yellow book with a clop, and slid it across the desk, where it melted from view when someone took it. Blue Boy turned, hands slipping into his shorts pockets. He paused, brow crinkling. El touched his shoulder, lightly. "Blue Boy," she whispered.

He flinched, blinking. Then for a second, he looked right at her, wide grey eyes fixed on hers, and El's heart hammered in her chest.

"Hey."

El whipped the bandana off her forehead, swallowing up at Hopper, backlit by the living room light. He sighed. "Looking for Mike again?"

El didn't want to lie, so she just shrugged, fiddling with her hands. Hopper stayed up late sometimes, but she'd just assumed he'd gone, today. "Mike wasn't there," she said, which was the truth.

Hopper sighed again, looking at her with that strange expression she hadn't learned to read yet. Something like worry, but not quite. Someday she'd find the word in her dictionary. "Do you want some hot cocoa?" Hopper finally said, hand fidgeting on the doorknob.

El perked up. "Yes," she said, lips tugging upward in a small smile. "Yes, please."

"Put the bandana away, then," he said quickly. "And turn off the TV." He turned and shut the door while El was reaching up to switch it off.

Just for a second, she thought she heard something in the static.

"*Delores?*"

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

surprisingly, this wasn't supposed to be a one-shot. I just couldn't figure out this chapter and was stuck!  
woo!

### 3. Gray

Mike cycled as fast as he could, pedaling harder than he ever had before.

He hated how much easier it was without Eleven with him.

Mike took a lot of these lonesome rides. Just him and the wind, where he was going so fast even he couldn't hear his crying. Nancy tried to console him, whenever he broke down like this. But he couldn't deal with it, not today. He'd felt it coming during the fifth period and had left a note at Mr. Clark's desk and bolted to his bike. It had been three months since Eleven went missing-

*Dead. She's dead and she's lost in the Upside Down and she's never coming back.*

No. Missing. Ever since Eleven went missing he'd been having these stupid breakdowns, where he felt like things were falling apart around the edges, where all he felt was *I want it back the way it was before*. Mrs. Byers called them panic attacks, said Johnathan used to have them after their dad left, but it didn't feel like panic. It just felt like hopelessness, and shaking, and being weak. The moments they happened didn't make sense. Today was supposed to be good! After school he was going to give Will the custom figurine of Will the Wise he'd made... and Mike had been really looking forward to seeing Will excited again. He'd been kind of down because of all the testing, and it was supposed to cheer him up... and now this stupid panic was ruining it.

Mike didn't really know where he was going. Sometimes he'd go to the quarry and sit at the ledge, feet swinging and kicking the rocks. He'd contemplate jumping, just to see if Eleven would catch him again. He always backed out, thinking *coward*.

But he didn't want to go to the quarry today. Not when Will was feeling better. Didn't want to stir up old memories of Will's "death" by going there. No, today he'd head... to the edge of town. Yes, there. Where he could look out at where she might be. Maybe she was in some far-off city, with cars and huge buildings, living her life by

herself. Or who knows, maybe she would be there, waiting at the edge of Hawkins for him.

Mike biked faster. Even faster, faster, faster than he ever could when Eleven was with him. Mike hated how he couldn't even talk about what had happened with anybody but their group, and even then sometimes it was frustrating. Dustin always laughed it off when he mentioned his little breakdowns, said everybody got those. He didn't even want to try it with Lucas. Will would probably understand, but he had enough on his plate, and Mike didn't want to worry him. Nancy had Jonathan and Steve and whoever else she was hanging out with. Never Mike. Nancy never hung out with Mike.

Mike didn't want to talk to his sister anyway. How embarrassing. Panting from his frantic pedaling, trying to catch his breath, he started to see the welcome to Hawkins sign coming up, all pastel and happy. He stopped pedaling and skidded to a halt, but not before he noticed something odd.

A guy. Sitting there with his back on one of the poles of the sign, eating a sandwich. Mike squinted at him. The guy made a little cursory wave before taking another bite. Mike walked closer, dragging his bike with him. The boy crossed his legs and raised an eyebrow at Mike, a little wary. "What do you want, kid?" the boy asked.

"Who're you?"

The strange boy's mouth frowned, before taking another, slow bite out of the sandwich, clearly saying *get out of my face* with his eyes.

He didn't know Mike wasn't scared of anything anymore.

Mike walked next to him and squatted down. "I'm Mike. What's your name?" he asked, looking at him. The boy blinked, and then set down his sandwich, carefully putting it in a plastic bag while he chewed. Next to him, Mike noticed, was a fish. In a bag. "Why do you have a fish?" Mike added, cocking his head. "And what's with the uniform?"

The boy smiled, though it was a sarcastic little smile Mike usually saw accompanying adults who were about to say something

extremely condescending. Which was weird, because he was only a year or two older than Mike. “Which question do you want answered most, kid?” the boy said.

Mike considered it. “Who are you?”

“Good question,” he said, face only a little amused. “I’m just here.”

“*Why* are you here?” Mike asked back. “That wasn’t really a good answer,” he added. Mike tilted his head, watching the strange boy go back to his sandwich.

He finished the last few bites before looking up thoughtfully, blinking at the sky. “I guess I’m here because I ran away from home. In a roundabout way,” he said conversationally.

Oh. A runaway. Mike felt a thrill of excitement bubble up inside him. An adventure. Someone to save. Mike swallowed. “Where’s your home, then?” he asked carefully.

The boy swallowed, eyes sliding away from Mike. “Irrelevant,” he said crisply. “Listen, Mike, do you know where Hawkins Labs is?”

Mike felt his heartbeat speed up as his brain started to think. A strange boy showed up in Hawkins looking for the labs, edged in grey seriousness and dodging questions. Sounded familiar. Mike snatched the boy’s wrist, turning it over. At first he felt confusion, then pain, as the strange boy flipped Mike’s grip, fingers twisting painfully on Mike’s skin.

Mike stuttered and the strange boy’s vice-like grip on his arm increased, without him moving at all. Mike couldn’t see the tattoo anymore, it was hidden under his sleeve. *An umbrella?* he thought, bewildered.

“What were you looking for?” asked the boy evenly, staring at Mike with stone in his eyes, nails digging into Mike’s skin. Mike gasped, beads of sweat forming on his forehead as he tried to wrestle the uniformed boy off him. They ended up sprawled in the dirt, and the crazy boy pinned him to the floor, growling in his face.

Mike squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head no. He wouldn’t betray

Eleven, not if she was still alive.

“What,” the crazy boy started, leaning in closer, “Were you looking for?” His voice was even, too even. Mike felt chills, and not just from the icy ground behind his back.

Mike swallowed. “A tattoo,” he said, stuttering a little. “But yours is different.”

“Than what?” he asked, calm and sharp.

“Hers was--hers was a number,” he said quickly, hating himself.

The crazy boy paused, blinking. “What number?” he eventually asked, quieter than he’d been before.

Mike gulped, shaking his head.

“Tell me,” the crazy boy demanded.

“No.”

Crazy Boy tilted his head, searching Mike’s expression. Whatever he was looking for, he didn’t seem to find it. He seemed to make a decision, and then he pushed Mike’s wrists deeper into the ground, little bits of gravel digging into the backs of his hands.

“Where is she?” he said, calm and resolute.

Mike put on a brave face. “Where is who?” he said, innocent.

“Delores,” the crazy boy growled. “Eleven.”

Mike’s eyes widened, heart hammering. Of course he’d suspected, but he knew her. This crazy boy knew her! “She’s missing,” he stuttered. “I’ve been trying to find her but everyone thinks she’s dead and I--”

“She’s not dead,” the crazy boy muttered, eyes flickering up to the horizon. “Dammit,” he spat. He let Mike’s hands go, standing up and brushing his uniform off, still lost in thought.

Mike went up to his elbows, mind whirring at a furious pace. “She’s

not dead?" Mike repeated, breathless.

The crazy boy's eyes narrowed, like he hadn't realised Mike was still there. "Of course not. Now, If I ever hear you telling a *soul* I was even here today, I will murder you," he growled, deadpan. "Understood?"

Mike swallowed, the urge for teenage rebellion welling up inside him, but something cold in the crazy boy's eyes stopped him. "Understood," Mike whispered. He cleared his throat.

A tight, impatient smile suddenly appeared on the crazy boy's face. "Good," he replied. He adjusted his collar with the efficiency of an adult four times older than Mike. "Now run," he ordered, looking down at Mike, who was gaping too much to respond, too shocked to move. "Run!" screamed the crazy boy, and Mike scrambled to his feet.

He stumbled to his bike and hopped on faster than he'd ever gotten on his bike before. Mike put the pedal to the metal and realized, suddenly, that he was afraid of some things still.

That crazy boy was one of them.

## **4. A Small Fucking Town.**

Five hated small towns. Oh, he hated cities too, but there was a certain anonymity to busy streets and crowded apartment complexes that you just couldn't get in a town like this. Five knew that everyone was bound to know each other, every person so deep in each others' lives they could tell if someone changed so much as the soap they used in the shower. God. He could sort of imagine what that was like, having been under the Handler's thumb for so many years, but the interconnected web of people caring about other people was just a mystery to him.

He'd never really cared about the lot of humanity. Just a few humans.

Five trudged through the street, hating the glaring cold sun and his lack of direction. That Mike boy hadn't been *any* help, besides confirming that this was the Hawkins Delores was hiding in.

The police station was an obvious choice. Look around for missing persons' reports. But he knew what small town police officers were like, as much as he knew what small towns were like. Suspicious, all-too coveting of their small position of power.

Five didn't feel like dealing with that today. He stepped onto the beginning of a sidewalk, glancing around the shops and stores lining the downtown area. Looked almost dead, to be honest. Sale signs fluttered, people pasted posters onto already crowded telephone poles.

Someone bumped into him, stuttered out a small apology, and then hurried the other way, carrying posters under one arm. Five raised a mildly curious eyebrow, readjusting his coat.

Dead town with a not-so-dead secret. Perhaps he *would* go to the police station. There didn't seem to be any alternatives. Five looked himself in the window of a run-down supermarket, frowned at the stains of blood on his uniform. He'd attempted to wash them out since the day he'd killed the board, but he hadn't had the proper materials and the time. Five hesitated as he considered taking his

coat off. He'd certainly look less suspicious but...

Despite it all, Five still had an appreciation for a respectable outfit. The coat stayed on.

*Police station, police station...* god, southern towns were always built in the most haphazard way. Five was willing to bet that there was a forest somewhere with dozens of shack-like houses like the ones he'd squatted in during the apocalypse.

There were no goddamn directional signs anywhere in the downtown, most likely due to the fact that everyone in the town was born and raised there. Certainly nobody in their right mind would ever willingly migrate to such a place, even in the-what was it? The eighties? Five sighed as he pushed open the door to the one open store, the bell jingling merrily.

A head popped up over the counter, at first delighted and then slightly confused.

"Hi," said Five dryly, knowing for a fact that this encounter was going to be the most draining part of his day, and he'd murdered a truck driver earlier. "I'm looking for--"

"We have everything here," said the woman excitedly. "Appliances, lights, phones--"

"Directions. I'm looking for directions," Five clarified, sticking his hands into his pockets.

The woman's face fell. "Oh."

"Yeah, sorry to burst your bubble. Where's the police station?"

"What're you doing looking for the police?" she asked, slightly baffled.

Five shrugged. "I don't know why you need to know."

"Well, I--"

"Just tell me where the goddamn police live and I'll leave, okay?" he

snapped. Okay, so maybe he was a little wound up. Small towns just did that to him, an itchy feeling crawling up his back. Or maybe he was just itching to get back to his own time.

The woman blinked, again taken aback by his attitude. “Well, I never,” she said softly. “The police station’s on the corner of sixth and third. Now get your ass out of here before I send you myself.”

Five rolled his eyes and left, the bell jingling behind him. People just needed to understand that his business was more important than theirs and that leaving him to it was the best option. They’d understood that when he was an assassin, or at least when he looked like he’d been through puberty.

On the way to sixth and third, Five passed what looked like an arcade. He paused for a second, remembering the time he and Allison had snuck out together to play Knight Crusher together. Arguably the most different two of all the siblings joined together by their competitive urge to *crush the living daylights out of pixellated enemies*. Good times.

Before Five could bury those wistful thoughts, someone shoved into him. He stumbled forward, off the sidewalk and into the parking lot.

“Hey, kid,” said a slightly southern voice.

Five turned, eyebrow raised, and saw what might have been the most disastrously eighties being he’d ever seen. Mullet and everything. “Yes?” he said, barely tolerating the distraction.

“Have you seen, like, a little redhead girl?” he sighed. He stuck out a hand to a little lower than his shoulder. “Like, yea high? Real annoying.”

“Nope,” said Five, turning to leave.

The guy grabbed his shoulder, and Five fought not to snatch his wrist and break it. “Hold on a second,” the guy said, and Five could hear the smirk in his voice. “I need you to go look for her. She was supposed to come out like five minutes ago and I’m late for a date. Just tell her to skate home.”

"I'm not doing your chores," said Five blandly, delicately moving the guy's hand off of his shoulder.

He snatched it again, fingers closing into a loop around Five's admittedly tiny wrist. "You will," he said, leaning in close.

"Or what?" laughed Five. "You'll beat me up? Just because I won't tell your little sister you said hi?"

The grip tightened, and Five, still a little too on edge, took note of the nearly deserted town and the only potential witness, who was incredibly devoted to her window shopping. "Listen here, you little shit," growled the guy.

Five kneed him in the groin, elbowed him in the side, and punched him across the cheek. While his eyes were conveniently closed, Five teleported into a nearby alley and shook his aching fist off. God, that had felt good. It felt even better when he heard the guy's cry of astonishment and pain..

But then his day got irrevocably worse.

A girl. Standing in the middle of the alley, eyes wide. She raised a finger, jaw agog, magazines slipping out of her hand and onto the slushy ground.

Five let out a growl of frustration. "You didn't see anything," he snarled, but he already knew it was useless. *Whatever*, he thought as he shoved past her and out onto sixth street.

He was already so done with this stupid fucking town.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

so sorry this is so late! I was hyperfixating on stupid fucking markiplier egos and forgot I liked other stuff!

## 5. I'm Fine Haha...

### Notes for the Chapter:

what's that? inspiration, knocking, knocking at my door? a rare visitor, to be sure.

Will didn't feel okay.

It was too much. He'd had to go to one of his doctor's appointments yesterday, and he'd been drowsy and tingly all morning in class. Something just felt a little off. He knew Lucas could tell he wasn't okay.

Lucas nudged his shoulder with his own. "You alright?"

Will nodded. "I guess, yeah."

"You guess?"

He made a little half shrug with his shoulder. "Just tired. Headache."

Lucas's eyes narrowed, but before he could say anything Dustin slammed his lunch tray onto the table. "Where's Mike?" Dustin asked, sliding clumsily into his seat.

"Ran off before science," explained Lucas, before taking a bite of his sandwich. "Probably moping."

"Third time this week."

Will snuck out the piece of paper he'd folded up in his jacket pocket, smoothing it onto the table. He'd been having weird dreams recently. Not *bad* weird, just a little... strange.

He'd been dreaming about something blue, a specific shade he couldn't quite get right even with the new colored pencils Jonathan had given him for his birthday. Will tried anyway, shading in the edges of the warped blob he'd made, trying his hardest to ignore the throbbing in his skull. It was like someone was pulling on his heartbeat.

*Poetic*, he thought absently. *Should tell Jonathan about that one.*

Will leaned his cheek on his hand and flipped the page over to the blank side. Eventually, he tuned everything out. Dustin's absentminded chatter droned in his ears, like he was hearing it through a radio or a TV. Dimly, he heard the scratching of his pencil. He registered a ruckus from behind them, two girls yelling.

Will kept drawing. Something else he'd seen in the dream, something else to distract him from the tingling on the back of his neck, the sense of something getting closer.

"Will."

He was using his black pencil, had switched somewhere from the blue.

"Will."

It was a little messy, but that was okay. He'd seen it messy, through that extraordinary blue.

"Will."

Will's head snapped up when he realised Lucas was shaking his shoulder. "What?" he said, bewildered.

"Dude," laughed Dustin, leaning back on the bench. "You are *not* okay."

Will blushed. "Sorry," he muttered. "I had a weird dream the other day. Not--not anything serious," he said quickly, to amend their worried expressions. "Just weird, I dunno."

"So that's why you were drawing an umbrella with the mindset of a zombie?" asked Lucas doubtfully.

Will looked down, and blinked. He had drawn an umbrella, surrounded by a circle. It was messy, distorted, like he'd seen it through a really bad old TV. "Uh..." *Just pretend like you knew that was what you were drawing.* "Yeah. I suppose."

Will folded it up again and shoved it into his pocket.

“Hey, sorry,” said a voice from behind him.

Will looked up in surprise as Mike slid into the seat next to him, smoothing down his shirt. He looked... rattled. Like he’d seen a ghost. His star-struck expression wasn’t helped any by his wild hair, windswept by what Will was guessing was a very fast bike ride.

Dustin slammed a fist down onto the table. “Where were you? We had our chemistry science lesson today, with beakers and Bunson burners and everything. It was awesome, and you missed it!”

“Sorry,” apologized Mike again. “Just had to take off for a bit. I dunno.”

Will flashed him a smile, fidgeting with his colored pencils as he shoved them back into his pocket. He’d had that pocket specifically altered to fit his colored pencils.

“Dustin’s hyping it up,” said Lucas through a mouthful of sandwich. “Wasn’t that cool. You didn’t miss much.”

“Uh,” scoffed Dustin. “He missed the thing where the liquid turned into a giant pile of foam!”

“I missed a giant pile of foam?” said Mike. “Doesn’t sound that great.”

Despite his jovial tone, Will could still tell something was wrong. Call it years of faking being alright himself, or maybe he was just that good of a friend, he could tell when something was bothering Mike. Usually it was El, but today... it was something else.

Will leaned his cheek on his hand and watched Mike for a little bit, watched him joking and laughing with Dustin. There was something just... off.

The bell startled Will out of his trance, and he hurried to collect his lunch back into the bag and back into his backpack. “See you after school?” he said to Dustin and Lucas, knowing their schedules didn’t align for the rest of the day.

They nodded their agreement as they shrugged their backpacks on.

Will and Mike shared English, so they walked together. “Hey, everything alright?” said Mike, looking over at him as they shoved their way through throngs of friends and cliques. “Pretty zoned out at lunch.”

Will gave him a lopsided smile, shrugging a little. “You know me. Zoning out is sort of my thing, right?”

“I guess,” Mike sighed, swallowing.

Will paused as they turned a corner. “Are you alright?”

Mike started. “What? What do you mean?”

Will shrunk back as Mike shoved open the door to the English classroom, already bustling with their peers. “I dunno. You came back with a weird look on your face.”

“I’m fine,” said Mike quickly, as he slid into his seat.

Now Will knew there was something wrong. Whenever he’d asked that question, in the past, Mike had always taken the opportunity to complain about El, or his sister, or schoolwork. Mike, ignoring his weird emo phase? Will had never been suspicious before.

Will filed it away for future reference as he turned back to their teacher, who was trying desperately to garner the attention of the raucous chattering crowd around them.

English was boring.

Art was fun.

P.E. was hell.

And then he was done, headache still throbbing away, though it had retreated to more of a dull ache than a full-blown migraine. Will ran out of the door with the dozens of other relieved students, stumbling to the bike rack. Dustin and Lucas were already there, in the midst of yet another friendly argument.

“Hey,” said Will, smiling.

“Hey yourself,” replied Dustin, grinning. “We’re going over to Mike’s later, right?”

Will nodded. “I think so.”

“Maybe we’ll get to play DnD without Mike sneaking in some not-so-obscure reference to El,” said Lucas wryly, folding his arms and leaning back onto his bike. “I know he misses her, we all do, but it’s getting a bit old.”

Will shrugged noncommittally. “I guess so. I wanna try out that new spell I got when we leveled up.”

“The one with the wind?”

“Yeah! Supposed to heal people, too.”

“Oooh, yeah, that’ll be so useful in the next boss battle. I think Mike’s been planning something kinda big and I want us to be as prepared as possible--”

Will listened eagerly, hands fidgeting on the straps of his backpack. Mike joined them for a little bit, having come from the opposite side of the school, and then they went their separate ways. Everybody knew the good DnD happened at night, and they had to do their homework.

Jonathan was in a mood, on the car ride back. “The quiz is on Friday,” he was saying, as Will was staring out of the window. “Nancy’s freaking out about it.”

“Hm,” murmured Will. “Nancy.”

It was all about Nancy, these days. Not that Will minded. It was fun to hear about girls and boys and silly drama.

“Yeah,” sighed Jonathan, hands flexing on the cracking leather wheel of his car. “I told her we could study, but... she’s hanging out with Steve tonight.” He shook himself as they turned the corner. “Anyway. How was your day?”

"Headache," Will replied, leaning back into the seat.

Jonathan glanced at him. "Bad one?"

"Not really. Didn't feel like the other ones. Not... stabbing. Just kind of there. Tingling." Will shrugged, knowing he lacked the proper words. "Art was fun, though," he supplied, in order to change the subject. "Got to work with clay."

"Yeah? You gonna be making your own little Will the Wise figure now?" Jonathan joked.

Will smiled. "I'm not that good. We're just doing pots n' stuff."

"Well, you'll get good. And then we'll set up a pottery wheel, and then you'll sell them for thousands of dollars and everyone in Indiana is gonna want them, and then we'll be so rich that--"

Will snickered, and Jonathan's deadpan face broke into a grin as they turned into the driveway. "Yeah, sure," sighed Will, unbuckling himself.

They got out of the car, each brother respectively pulling on their backpacks. Will needed a new one, the handles were getting a little worn, but he supposed it could wait another year. Maybe until he could get Jonathan's black one. He'd look so cool with a black backpack.

Jonathan and Will trudged up the steps.

And it happened. Pain, tingling pain in his hands and his head, making him drop to the floor. He could feel blue, crawling up his neck, little tingles and jabs that made him gasp.

And as soon as it had begun, it ended. Will was staring at the sky, his shoulder being shaken. "Will?" said someone dimly, frantic.

"I'm fine," he slurred thickly, blinking.

"Oh my god, Will, don't--don't move, I'll get mom--"

Will stumbled to his feet, holding his head. "No!" he cried, lunging

for Jonathan's shirtsleeve. "I'm fine," he said again. "Just a little--a little faint. Y'know that thing where you stand up too quickly and then your vision goes all black? It was that thing."

Jonathan hesitated, halfway inside the door. His worried eyes scanned Will up and down, who was desperately trying to seem as fine as possible. If there was even the slightest possibility of Will being not fine, he wouldn't get to go to DnD. Jonathan swallowed. "Okay," he said. It didn't sound like he believed him, but Will knew his brother well enough to know that meant Jonathan was letting him slide.

"Cool," he said, trying not to smile.

Three hours later, after an *extremely* nutritious meal of pizza and orange juice, Will was in the car with Jonathan again, excitedly chattering about the new spell. "I think we'll really have a chance even if it's like, a rust monster. Because it's not an item, it's just a thing Will the Wise learned, and Mike's been hinting at a rust monster, so even if it is I won't lose it."

"That's really cool," said Jonathan, nodding.

Will knew he was just being tolerant, but he was just so excited, he couldn't help it. "Dustin's character also got this really cool new battleaxe. It does 1d8 of damage and he can swing it two times, but that's not the cool part. The cool part is that he can't be--"

They pulled up into the driveway, and Will stopped himself mid-rant. "Anyway, bye," he said hurriedly, collecting all of his stuff.

"Back at eight, right?"

Will glanced up, eyes pleading. "Eight thirty?"

Jonathan smiled. "Eight, but I'm going to be accidentally thirty minutes late because I was doing my homework and lost track of time."

Will grinned. "Boy, that's a shame."

“Sure is. Now get out, I have homework to do.”

Will got out, waved him goodbye, and ran to the door. Mrs. Wheeler opened the door. “Hi, Mrs. Wheeler!” he said, slipping past her into the house. He ran down the basement stairs, clutching his book and paper.

Mike turned from where he was standing in front of the table, the DnD board...

Upside down. Of course. He’d heard all the stories of them figuring it out. Will’s smile fell as he skidded into the basement, knowing for sure now that something was up.

*Well, he thought. Let’s hope it’s not something too teen angst-y.*

“Hey,” said Mike, running a hand through his hair and attempting a smile. “You ready to face the rust monster?”

“You’re not supposed to tell us what it is,” retorted Will, stalking over to the table. He set his book and paper down.

Mike stuck out his tongue, but his face brightened suddenly. “Wait. I got you something.”

“Huh?”

Mike turned and rummaged through a few boxes, throwing toys and blankets this way and that. Eventually, he found a box. “Sorry,” he said, glancing around at the mess. “Mom tried to tidy it today.”

He handed Will the box. Will grinned as he opened it. It had been a while since Mike had done something for just him, besides... rescuing him from an alien hell. Something normal, then.

Will threw the tissue paper behind him and found... a tiny Will the Wise model. “Oh, wow,” he breathed, holding it up to the light.

“I found it at the flea market, but I got Nancy to paint it,” he said eagerly.

“Wait, wait, I’ll put him on the little drawing space on the character

sheet,” said Will, moving his papers around on the table. He positioned the figurine onto the circle, but Mike wasn’t paying attention.

He was looking at the drawing. The one Will had made during lunch.

Will glanced between him and it. He hadn’t even realised he’d brought it with him. “What’re you...”

Mike picked it up, eyes wide like he’d seen a ghost. He looked up. “We need to talk.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

as always, comments make my day (don't be shy!! I love you!!)

## 6. Boring

Jim Hopper was the only one in the whole town who knew that Eleven was still alive. He'd known for months. The Eggos, for one. And there were the tiny footsteps farmers and hunters kept seeing. Not exactly sneaky, that girl. So he'd found her, put her in a warm cabin, and taught her things. Things like *stay in the house* and *Eggos do not encompass the four food groups* and also things like *that's an oven, El, don't put your hand in that*. He supposed it was good, him having something to think about besides Will's less-than-excellent recovery and the boring sludge that was work. Jim popped another apple slice into his mouth, trying to read about a near-robbery of a vending machine.

God, it was so boring. Boring was good for the town and bad for Jim Hopper. Jim sighed and took his feet off the desk, scratching his head as he threw the paper into the 'done' pile, not even bothering to read the last page.

"Hey, Hop?" asked Powell, poking his stupid head through the door. He looked... slightly concerned, which was more concerned than Jim ever saw him.

Jim sighed. "What. Is it Murray again?"

Powell swallowed. "No. It's... it's a kid."

"Lucas get up to some trouble again?" asked Jim, tapping his fingers on the table.

Powell shook his head. "No. I've never seen this one before. He came into the office about five minutes ago asking... weird questions. Stuff kids shouldn't be asking about. I told him to wait for you, cuz of all that business with... y'know." Jim's fingers stilled on the desk. He glanced up at his officer.

"Is he still here?" he asked quietly. Powell nodded, and Jim shoved past him into the main area. He didn't spot the kid immediately, but when he did it was obvious he was out of place. He was sitting in his bright blue uniform though it was discolored by rust-colored

splotches that he'd clearly tried to wash out. The kid bounced his knee and looked at the clock.

Jim walked up to him, put his hands in his pockets. "Hey," he said. "Jim Hopper. Chief Detective here."

The boy looked him up and down, eyebrows raised. "Of course," he muttered, standing up and brushing himself off. "I'm looking for a missing persons report? Probably from around last year?"

Jim rose a brow. "Really?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Why?"

The boy shrugged. "School report. I'm interested in crime statistics."

Jim didn't buy it. Being a practiced liar himself, he knew when someone was bullshitting him. He just didn't know what about quite yet. "Right," he said. "Why don't you come into my office?"

The kid smirked. "Lead the way, Jim."

As he gestured for the kid to follow him, Jim reflected on the fact he'd never really liked kids, even when he was one himself. El was really the only kid he'd connected with, and she was raised in a hostile experimentation facility, so she wasn't really a good baseline for whether or not Hopper could handle kids.

The door swung shut, and the kid shoved his hands deep into his shorts pockets.

"Listen," said Hopper. "What's your name, kid?"

"Ivy."

"Isn't that a girl's name?"

"It's short for something. Doesn't matter."

Jim sighed, leaning against his desk. "I can't give you the

investigation details, Ivy. You're not an officer, and you're not nearly old enough."

Ivy seemed to bristle for a second, but he took a breath in through his nose and seemed to grit his teeth against whatever snide comment he was inevitably itching to make. Kids. Especially smart-aleck kids. "Fine," he said shortly. "Whatever. Can I have directions to Hawkins Labs, then? Nothing fancy, just point in the direction and I'll find it."

Jim blinked. The world seemed to narrow, and what seemed like a case of idle strangeness was now vitally important. He couldn't have anyone asking around Hawkins Labs, not when Eleven's safety was hanging in the balance of nobody knowing she was alive. If the scientists thought that Jim had somehow spilled the beans, then--

"What's your name short for?" said Jim slowly, looking him up and down.

Ivy swallowed. "Ivory."

"Stop bullshitting me. No self-respecting parent would name a boy that, and with that fancy uniform you're bound to have important folks."

Ivy's mouth tugged up into that insufferable smirk. "Bold of you to assume I wasn't adopted."

"Drop the bullshit," growled Jim. "What do you want with Hawkins Labs?"

"If you're not going to give me directions, I'm going to leave," he snarled back, turning to the door.

"Hold on a minute. You're not going anywhere." He grabbed Ivy's shoulder, wedging himself between the door and his young associate.

"Don't touch me," Ivy snapped, snatching his hand off. His eyes were angry as he looked up at Jim. "Listen. Whatever you think I want, I promise it's not that. Get out of my way."

"What do you want, then?"

“I’m looking for someone,” he admitted.

“Why?”

“None of your fucking business, that’s why,” Ivy snapped. “Now move, or I’m gonna scream.”

Jim blinked. “What?”

“I’m gonna scream. That’ll damage your reputation, yeah? Assaulting a kid.”

Jim stepped back, hands in the air. No matter how much of an asshole this kid was, he couldn’t risk that. And besides, he clearly wasn’t getting anything more out of Ivy.

Ivy shoved past him and out of the door in a quicksilver way, marching out of the precinct.

Jim deeply regretted his earlier wish.

Boring was bad for Jim Hopper, but god, this was *too* interesting.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

listen. I'm aware I could have put his pseudonym as Ivan but Ivy is so much fucking funnier. anyway - comments are my lifeblood, please give comments or I will die on the spot. love you bye!!

## 7. Prophet

Will felt a sinking feeling in his chest as Mike pulled him into a shadowed corner.

“Listen,” Mike hissed, looking furtively around. “When Dustin and Lucas get here, we have to go for a bike ride.”

Will blinked. “I’m not allowed to--”

“Please, Will,” said Mike desperately, searching Will’s eyes. “I promise it’s important. And I can’t say it here.”

Will swallowed, looking behind him at the window. They’d discovered, about two weeks earlier, a listening device implanted by the Hawkins Labs scientists, and though they’d crushed that one there were probably twenty more. Clearly Mike didn’t want to talk about whatever it was where the scientists could hear.

Will’s heart sank even further as he met Mike’s eyes again. Mike looked almost *happy*, to be having something dangerous going on.

*No DnD tonight.* Apparently something else was at stake. If Mike was right, if there was something to the drawing, and he was worried about it... maybe there were lives at stake. Will couldn’t risk it.

Will sighed, eyes squeezing shut. “Fine,” he said shortly, with a sigh.

“Yes!” hissed Mike, pulling him in for a quick hug. “Thanks, Will.”

Will swallowed, looking at the floor.

He just wanted to play DnD.

Will heard a clamor from upstairs, heard Dustin laughing at something as shoes clomped down the stairs. Mike’s head shot up, and Will spotted the edge of an anticipatory grin on his face. Will hadn’t seen him this excited in months.

Dustin practically fell down the steps, followed by a much more graceful Lucas. “Hey, guys,” said Dustin. “Why’re you over there in

the corner?"

Mike grabbed his coat off of a chair, knocking over Will's figurine as he did so. "How do you guys feel about a super-secret bike ride?"

Dustin blinked. "I mean, excellently, but what about DnD and--"

"And Will can't go," pointed out Lucas.

Mike held a finger to his lips, eyes twinkling. Clearly Lucas and Dustin noticed the change in mood, eyes narrowing as they glanced between Mike and the glum Will. But their apprehension was quickly overshadowed by their curiosity and eagerness, and they soon were grinning too.

Will sighed as they raced back up the stairs, quietly as to not alert Mike's parents.

He sighed again as he hopped onto Mike's two-seater, shivering in the cold. He hated the cold.

He sighed once more as they pulled up to the edge of a forest, leaving their bikes in a heap as they walked down the road a safe distance from the possibly bug-ridden things.

"Okay, so," started Mike eagerly. "Earlier today, I met... a kid. At the edge of town."

Dustin frowned. "Why were you at--"

"Doesn't matter," Mike butted in quickly. "Just biking. And I saw this... this kid, sitting there eating a sandwich. He had on a blue uniform, and there was this badge - I could probably recognize it if I saw it again, but the thing was he had a *tattoo*."

The sinking feeling deepened. Another mystery. Another distraction from the way things used to be. Will swallowed. "A tattoo?"

"Like - like this!" Mike cried, shaking the paper. "An umbrella!"

Will looked down at his drawing, clutched in Mike's gloved hands. He wished he'd forgotten it at home, or, better yet, he wished he'd

never drawn it. Or even dreamt it. Will didn't want to be anyone's prophet.

Dustin took it from him, frowning as he looked at it. "That's the thing Will was drawing at lunch, when he was acting so..."

"Weird," volunteered Will, feeling himself getting more frustrated by the minute. "You can say it. I was being weird."

The boys glanced among themselves, swallowing. "Yeah," said Lucas finally. "You were being weird."

"Wait, but how--"

"I don't know," said Mike to Lucas, and Will spotted another giddy grin. "And that's the best part. Because Will was in the upside down, so maybe... this guy was in the upside down too. I don't know. I don't know what any of it means, but..." Mike sighed, seemingly to himself. He put his hands behind his head and started to pace the road. "Because he was looking for Eleven. He knew her name, but he called her... something else. Dotty, or something."

"You think he knew El?" said Lucas, almost awestruck.

Mike nodded. "Yeah. I do. Only... only we can't tell anyone."

Will blinked. He'd assumed Mike would want to tell everyone he could, like Hopper and Jonathan. "What? Why not?"

"He said... he said he'd kill me if I told," said Mike, swallowing.

"Wait, and you just told us?" spluttered Lucas. "What if he comes after us too?"

"Yeah!" agreed Dustin.

Will shrugged, scuffing his toe onto the concrete.

"Real jerk move, Mike. You could have left us in the dark and we would have been just fine and dandy!" cried Dustin, throwing his hands up into the air.

Lucas shook his head in disappointment, folding his arms.

Mike swallowed. "Fine. I'm sorry. Just... don't tell anyone else," he said with a nervous smile. "But he's somewhere in Hawkins, looking for Eleven. And he might be able to find her, who knows? So if we find him..."

"We might find El," finished Lucas, sighing. "I get it."

"Wait, wait, wait," stuttered out Dustin, waving his hands. "We're just going to go *looking* for this highly unstable maniac who wants to kill you? He'll know you told, if we're involved!"

Mike looked slightly put out, chewing his lip as he thought.

*You didn't plan this out at all, did you.*

Will kept his thoughts to himself, shuffling his feet as he fiddled with his sleeves. Of course he was curious about Mike's mystery man, but he didn't want to get *killed* over it. Some mysteries were just better left unsolved. Will sighed. "Can we just... go play DnD?" he said quietly.

They all glanced over at him. Lucas looked slightly guilty, but Mike didn't even seem to notice. He just kept thinking. "What if—" Mike started, "What if you all just, like... do recon? Alright? Just keep an eye out."

Dustin sighed. "I guess. Fine. Whatever."

"If it helps find El..." Lucas shrugged. "I'm down for anything that doesn't involve a maniac murdering me."

Mike grinned. "Perfect."

They headed back to the house.

And they finally played some fucking DnD.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

listen it's a kind of lackluster chapter - I'LL FREELY

ADMIT THAT - but I've been working furiously on  
the next couple, so don't worry, the big fancy words  
and character exposition are on their way.  
as always: give me a comment and I'll give you my  
undying love and admiration. toodle-oo!

## 8. Interlude

Five hadn't meant for that to go the way it did. He had *meant* to get some info about Hawkins Labs from the fuzz and then go over there and... well, destroy the place. He was feeling a little antsy and some murder sounded nice.

But Delores was apparently missing for real, not just in that kid Mike's head, and he didn't know how to find her without the police report. Also, angering Jim Hopper the Classic Country Boy Police Officer had probably not been the best idea. Whatever. He wasn't going to stay in town for very long, and Hopper looked like a bit of a brute. Five didn't think it was likely he would be clever enough to find him, and if he was, *nobody* in this small town was smart enough to actually kill him.

So what to do. It was getting late, and nobody in their right mind would welcome a strange man asking questions this late.

Five needed sleep. And also *coffee*. God, he wanted coffee. Or even alcohol would do. Something strong, bitter, and full of the stuff that made his brain marginally happier.

Five spotted a convenience store, the 'closed' sign taped to the dirty window.

It took him about half a second to make the decision to teleport in and rob it, and it only took about twice that to complete the action. He teleported onto the roof, squatting as popped the lid on the rum. He put the granola bars in his pockets, thankful he hadn't ditched the coat.

Five swallowed down the burning alcohol, quick eyes scanning the two-bit town for a place to sleep. Restaurants were too busy, and opened too early.

Alleyway was certainly an option. But he'd slept in far too many alleyways to want to sleep in another one.

But Five spotted the school, about a block away, tucked away from

the grittiest of the downtown area. Schools had closets. And when he woke up, in the morning, all he had to do was walk out like he was part of the school. For once, his puny body would actually be an asset.

Five stood, wiping his mouth and putting the lid back on the bottle. He teleported off the building and onto another roof, before hopping manually onto the roof of the school. Five kicked a stray kickball some unlucky student had accidentally thrown atop the rain-damp roof as he made his way to the roof access. As he'd expected, the door was open because of shitty 1980's security.

The hallway was dark, but Five knew how to navigate dark places. He walked down the hall, careless of the noise he was making, peeking into doors and closets, looking for a nice place to sleep. Honestly, anything out of the way would do.

When he found the janitor's closet, complete with three rather comfortable towels, Five knew he'd found the place.

The apocalypse had taught him to find a place to sleep, and to fall asleep in that place very quickly. The apocalypse had *not* taught him to lock the door.

Mike couldn't sleep. In the night of his room, in the slow darkness of the cold autumn night, the branches of the tree outside his house were scraping the windows. They looked like hands, spindly and frail.

They sounded like footsteps.

Mike clutched the covers and tried to believe that the crazy boy didn't know he'd told someone. He tried to believe that he was safe, in the lonely dark only lit by a glow-in-the-dark dragon hung from the ceiling. He stared at that solitary light, swallowing.

*I'm alone*, he reminded himself. *There's nobody there*.

*I'm alone*.

Will had fallen asleep after a night of distracted DnD. They'd fought the rust monster, sure, but Mike had been listless, uninvolving in the roleplay he'd been so enraptured in before. Will had felt his friend's boredom in the fake danger while the prospect of real danger was lurking in Hawkins, but he'd tried to make the best of it anyway.

Falling asleep wasn't easy. He'd taken his sleep meds, but of course his thoughts were haunted by Mike's weird new 'friend' and those daydreams he'd been having.

But when he fell asleep, it was a deep one.

He dreamt.

Will saw something else, in this dream. Hands. So many hands.

He saw one with smooth tawny skin, nails painted a bright red. It clutched a pen, writing words upon words upon words in tiny gold lettering. *Rumors*, they said. *I regret my rumors*.

He saw two pale hands, fingers smudged by sparkling black eyeshadow and cigarette-ash. *Hello*, they said. *Goodbye. It was nice to see you, but I don't belong here*.

He saw paler hands than those. Small, clean, white like marble. These hands said nothing as they clutched the dark bow of a darker violin. They played music like dancing, played music like weeping.

He saw two blood-stained hands, clutching a golden badge in one hand and a knife in the other. The knife cut into the palm. *Sorry*, they said. *Didn't mean to leave you behind*.

He saw two more hands, so big but too small to clutch anything important. Sand slipped through them, the sands of time and the sands of a far-off place, time wasted and time spent. *I made a mistake. I was supposed to protect you*.

He saw hands folded on a lap. Clear like glass. They flipped a pen between elegant fingers, ink spilling across those hands with each turn. Ink from a squid. *May the darkness within you find peace within*

*the light, they said. I know I sure didn't.*

He saw the last hand alone. It was young, about as small as Will's hand, pale and tiny in the vastness of Will's dream. It had blood splattered across its wrist, and it was reaching forward, desperate for something to hold onto. *I am alone, it said. I have always been alone.*

Will woke in a cold sweat.

He remembered nothing.

*Eleven, are you there?*

*Eleven, are you listening?*

*Eleven, wake up.*

#### **Notes for the Chapter:**

hehe can you tell i've been through finals week and back? anyway sorry for the wait and also that this is a stupid lil poetic interlude but i hope it was fun to read <3 anyway new bo burnham special comin out tomorrow, everybody!! im very pumped. also tired. did i mention finals? anyway love you please give comments

## 9. Concerned. A Teensy Bit Concerned.

### Notes for the Chapter:

this is v short do not get ur hopes up <3  
hfskjfhkdfhjk

Dustin really liked school. He liked the new things he got to learn, the scientific way he was learning to explore the world. He liked understanding things, he liked curiosity and experiments and equations he'd never heard of before. Dustin supposed that was what made him different than his friends, who complained constantly about school and how tired they got of learning new things they'd 'never use'. To Dustin, it didn't matter whether or not he could use the thing he'd learned or not. It just mattered that he knew it.

So Dustin liked school.

Hallways? Not so much. Not when a girl had bumped into him and spilled orange juice all over the waxed floor and Dustin's shoes.

"Hey--" he said, too late, for she had already moved into the rushing crowd quicker than quicksilver. Dustin made a frustrated noise, scuffing his shoe into the slick ground in an unsuccessful attempt to clean them off.

As he shook his head and walked away, a hand snagged his coat sleeve. "Where do you think you're going, mister?" accused a shrill voice. Dustin stumbled around and saw the dreaded face of Ms. Joy, the hall-monitor infamous for having the highest detention rate rivaling even that of Mr. Smith-Lacey, who taught at the *high school*.

Dustin swallowed. "What?" he said, mouth dry.

"I saw the spill," she snapped, clearly dyed eyebrow arching into an accusatory stare. "You bumped that girl. And weren't you going to stop to help? Or were you going to leave it all for the janitors?"

The bell rung, and Dustin glanced up at the speakers. "I-I have to get to class..."

"Not now you don't. Run to the janitor's hall closet and fetch me the mop," she sniffed, turning away to step delicately around the puddles of orange juice.

Dustin's brain grappled with the teeth-grinding frustration of an interruption to his favorite class, science, and the well-ingrained fear of Ms. Joy. After a few seconds of furious thought, he came to the conclusion he could just ask for a make-up after school and get some extra tidbits for his time.

So Dustin made his way to the nearest storage closet, still slightly irked that he'd been blamed for the spill when it really hadn't been his fault.

He opened the door.

He blinked.

A boy a couple of years older than him lay asleep on top of a tiny mountain of towels, arm sprawled around a bucket, clutching a bottle of what smelled like alcohol.

Dustin tried very, very hard not to freak out. *Instead* of doing that, he chose the much wiser route of closing the door. He stood there for a moment, taking deep breaths in and out, and then opened the door again (much slower this time) to snag the keys off the hook. He closed the door again and locked it quickly. All this time his eyes were as wide as dinner plates, and his heart going the pace of a healthy hummingbird.

Because while it would have been slightly sad that an alcoholic boy was asleep in the janitor's closet, and more than a little concerning, it was slightly *more* pressing what Dustin had noticed on the boy's wrist.

A tattoo of an umbrella.

### Notes for the Chapter:

tiny lil chapter to show you I'm still here lmao. so so so sorry about the apparent abandonment of this fic,  
I promise it's really not!

the comments have been oh-so-lovely and believe you me I am refreshing the askbox every like. 30 minutes bc they give me so much serotonin. anyway have a wonderful day dkjfhskj

**Author's Note:**

had this in a google doc for a while!